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ABSTRACT

This conference paper focuses attention on the rapid expansion of knowledge and the implications of this expansion for social studies teaching. In directing teaching to all students it is suggested that the approach be one which structures instruction so that the learner acquires key concepts, key generalizations and a knowledge of the historical development and structure of the discipline that he is studying. Some possible objectives for social studies instruction which emphasizes process rather than product are included. (SHM)

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CONTENT THROUGH METHODOLOGY

Convention of the National Council for the Social Studies

November 21, 1972

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I think it appropriate at the beginning of my presentation to quote Harold Shane writing in the National Society for the Study of Education 1971 Yearbook.

> Suppose that one of our remote ancestors lived fifty thousand years ago in the Yantze River valleys, or in the once fertile Lake Chad area, or in a Swiss lake village cluster, or in the Dordogne Valley caves of France. If his offspring, and their children through the centuries, had lived to be sixty to sixty-five years old they would represent an unbroken chain of 799 forebears, a chain in which a man who is sixty years old would be the eight-hundredth living link.
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> In the last three decades of the eight-hundredth man's life, more changes have taken place than occurred during the previous 799-1/2 lifetimes.

The implications of the expansion of this new knowledge for social studies teaching are enormous. Can classroom teachers continue to be content to teach history and the social sciences in a product-oriented way? Unfortunately some will still answer yes to such a query. When questioned further the elementary teacher will state that the accumulation of the historical knowledge will come in high school, the high school teacher states it will come in college, and the college teacher of the survey course states it will occur in the graduate school. This might be a safe assumption for those few who become professional social scientists and historians.* However, I would hope that social studies teachers would direct their teaching to all their students.

The more prudent alternative to an approach that emphasizes the acquisition of facts as the major objective would be a course or program that structures instruction so that the learner will acquire the key concepts, the

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*This may have been a major reason why Louis Harris found that 19 per cent of high school students found history the most boring subject. Life, May 16, 1969.

key generalizations, a knowledge of the historical development and the structure of the discipline that he is studying. With this as a basis, the learner now has what is necessary for him to proceed on his own to master a body of knowledge.

Mr. Gradgrind, infamous schoolmaster of the Charles Dickens novel Hard Times, should serve notice to us all concerning the abuse and misuse of facts.

> . . . 'Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon facts: nothing else will even be of any service to them . . .'
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> 'Girl number twenty,' said Mr. Gradgrind, squarely pointing with his square forfinger, 'I don't know that girl. Who is that girl?' 'Sissy Jupe, sir,' explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtseying.
>
> . . . 'Let me see, what is your father?' 'He belongs to the horseriding, if you please sir.' . . . 'Give me your definition of a horse.' (Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand.) 'Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!' said Mr. Gradgrind. . . . 'Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals! Some boy's definition of a horse, Bitzer, yours.' . . .
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> 'Quadruped, graminivorous. Forty teeth namely twenty-four grinders, four eyeteeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countires sheds hoofs too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.' . . .
>
> 'Now girl number twenty,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'You know what a horse is.'

Although veneered differently, Schoolmaster Gradgrinds are still with us today, just as fact oriented and just as inhumane.

In the expansion of knowledge in our society, many of the facts of yesterday are today's myths. Might not the classroom social studies teacher approach a problem or event from the point of historiography examining conflicting opinions of a particular incident or historical or contemporary personality.

For example, the learner may critically study conflicting accounts of the battles of Lexington and Concord, opposing opinions as to the real cause of the Pearl Harbor incident, contradictory solutions to prison reform or different views of American historians on the success of the administration of Harry A. Truman. This may involve discarding the textbook, the classroom bible of social studies of knowledge, and confining it to the role of one of many resources. The teachers and students may now have to research resources for their mutual examination, including such things as speeches, newspaper accounts, diaries and similar primary source materials. It would be sincerely hoped that during the above process-oriented social studies approach that students will develop skills of analysis and critical thinking as well as library and field research skills, that they will take with them from their social studies course. In addition, it is strongly urged that the example of Mr. Gradgrind in the affective domain is not emulated. Unfortunately, far too many classroom teachers are content-fact oriented to the exclusion of permitting their students to develop a healthy self-concept or aiding them not only to learn to learn but to love to learn.

What then should be the objectives of social studies instruction? Social studies teachers should create learning conditions that will maximize the opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking as they deal cognitively with methods of inquiry by which historical knowledge is discovered and verified. Likewise, history instruction should encourage and enable the learner to arrive at a body of generalizations about human societies. The classroom should serve as a forum for assessing alternative solutions in dealing with problems of society as well as the individual. Where students can learn to respect one anothers' opinions as well as achieve self-respect.

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*Bloom's cognitive and affective taxonomies can be helpful as a tool in guiding classroom activities.

Not since the days of the famed Eight Year Study, the Detroit Citizenship Education Study, the University of Kansas Reflective Teaching Experiments and the Miami Experiment in Democratic, Action-centered Education has there been such a concerted effort to examine social studies teaching methodology. This noble attempt has resulted in an increased emphasis on process rather than product.

Arno Bellack's (of Teachers College, Columbia University) comment on social studies instruction seems appropriate in closing.

> The objective of the teaching of the social sciences in all grades is to expose the folk wisdom and common sense that students absorb, through participation in the culture, to the light of analysis and empirical inquiry.

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3.0 The Social Studies Program Should Draw from Currently Valid Knowledge Representative of Man's Experience, Culture, and Beliefs.

3.1 The program should emphasize currently valid concepts, principles, and theories in the social sciences.

3.2 The program should develop proficiency in methods of inquiry in the social sciences and in techniques for processing social data.

3.3 The program should develop students' ability to distinguish among empirical, logical, definitional, and normative propositions and problems.

3.4 The program should draw upon all of the social sciences such as anthropology, economics, geography, political science, sociology, the history of the United States, and the history of the Western and non-Western worlds.

3.5 The program should draw from what is appropriate in other related fields such as psychology, law, communications, and the humanities.

3.6 The program should represent some balance between the immediate social environment of students and the larger social world; between small group and public issues; among local, national, and world affairs; among past, present, and future directions; and among Western and non-Western cultures.

3.7 The program should include the study not only of man's achievements, but also of those events and policies which are commonly considered contrary to present national goals, for example, slavery and imperialism.

3.8 The program must include a careful selection from the disciplines of that knowledge which is of most worth.

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